

A POLITICAL HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION  
FOR BLACK PEOPLE

( submitted by )  
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## INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in the socialization process ( i.e., schools, families, churches, media, etc. ) of any society. An educational system, consequently, functions to instill values, attitudes, behaviors, and skills supportive of the society for which it exists.

When examining education in America it is clear that it is that extension of a nation which serves the purpose of establishing its existence; training people to ensure that existence continues; and instilling in them the feeling that existence is necessary and good.

Historically, Black people in the United States have been victims of this country's need to maintain itself as a capitalist nation. There is opposition by the State that pushes Black people either to not be educated, places them low on the agenda, or educates them for certain functions. Clearly, then , education is political.

Education for Black people, one has to recognize, serves to benefit the oppressor, and decisively fails to meet the needs of Blacks. Therefore, it is necessary for Black people to define, and re-define an educational system which answers to their needs.

This paper attempts to serve as a vehicle for exploration into the questions evolving around the issue of education for Black people ( i.e., the inadequacies of our present educational system, community controlled schools, alternative education,etc. ) in a broad sense.

When dealing with the question of education for Black people it is basic to understand that until Blacks propose concrete programs for organizing education, which will meet the real needs of the Black community, the present educational system will continue to overlook Black struggle for change ( i.e., the educational sphere, economical exploitation, war, etc. ).

Until Black people expose the contradictions in the educational system; until they discover that extended education is not the magic key to upward mobility and higher earnings that it is played up to be; until Blacks realize that in the job market the same piece of paper which qualifies white high school graduates for white collar jobs only qualify Blacks to be tested for those jobs; until Black people stop accepting the myth that their failures exist because they are a " culturally deprived " and " culturally disadvantaged " people, which infers that there is nothing wrong with the system; Black people will continue to feel obligated to defend themselves and their children against a racist society.

Thus, this paper will focus particularly on some alternatives for Black people in the educational sphere; one example, community controlled schools, after taking a historical look at education for Black people.



Education in the fullest sense of the word is a process of socialization that has both formal elements ( i.e., schools ) and informal ones ( the family, social customs, the church, media,etc.). In any society the primary purpose of this process is to justify and support the existence of that society , and to train people to function within it. What this means is that the educational system is responsible for instilling values, attitudes, behaviors and skills which are common in a society. This primarily takes place in the school setting. <sup>1</sup>

Schools perform several functions for the maintenance of society. Along with the institutions of the family and religion, a primary responsibility is the socialization of newcomers to the society. A second function of schools, through their structure, content and methodology is to promote the premises upon which capitalist society is built, and train people to function effectively in it. <sup>2</sup>

The school in present day society is isolated, enveloped in bureaucracy. The consumer of the services in the schools- students, parents, the community, are neither involved in defining policy for the school, or in the determination of what shall be taught and how. This alienation from the educational process helps reinforce in people the idea that they are out of control of their lives. By its very structure then, the school serves to teach people to accept their powerlessness.

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1. Leonetta Gaines, Building a Pan-African Pre- School ( N.Y., East Publication, 1973 ) p.3

American education, like American society, is based upon the philosophy of " individualism " . According to this philosophy, the ambitious individual of average, or above average ability from the lower and middle class is constantly encouraged to climb up the social ladder out of his social class and community. To achieve this goal, he must conduct himself in ways that meet the approval and social standards of those in power. If he does this consistently to the satisfaction of those in power he is rewarded by promotion and advancement into the higher echelon of the system. <sup>3</sup>

In schools this means relating to teachers, and not your classmates. It means being passive and accepting what is taught you as being the " gospel " truth. You then feed this so-called truth back to the teachers, evading controversial questions which requires thinking for yourself, or taking a position.

The " individualist " orientation of students to the educational system has had very bad effects on the Black community. In the classroom over the years it isolates students from each other, as well as their potential for working together. In the end it not only upgrades individuals out of the community that might have been its natural leaders, it also creates a community which becomes poorer, and darker in color.

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3. Grace Lee Boggs, " Education : The Great Obsession " ( part of a lecture series entitled " Challenge of the 70's delivered at the University Center for Adult Education, Wayne State University, in the fall of 1969 ) p. 21.

## II. A Historical Perspective

" How we have arrived at this present state of affairs can be understood only by studying the forces effective in the development of Negro education since it was systematically undertaken immediately after Emancipation " <sup>4</sup> To point out the defects as they appear today have been determined by what has occurred in the past.

Philanthropists played an instrumental role in initiating education for Black people after the Civil War. One philanthropic agency, the Freedmen's Bureau devised a plan for teaching the newly freed slaves the simple duties of life. When systemized this effort became a program for the organization of churches and schools.

Black people soon realized that the " duties of life " these institutions were concerned with was life as they hoped to make it, not life as it was. When the Black man found himself deprived of political influence, and more than that unprepared to participate in the higher functions in the industrial development which this country began to undergo, it became evident to him that he was losing ground in the basic things in life. He was studying the things that were, or that might have been, but little to help him deal with the tasks at hand. <sup>5</sup>

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4. Carter G. Woodson, Mis- education of the Negro ( Wash., D.C., The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1969 ) p.9

5. Ibid., p. 11

There remained much controversy between missionary teachers from the North, and other more narrow-minded advocates of industrial education over whether Black people would be given classical, or practical education. Whites could not decide if Blacks would be taught to be good citizens - to obey authority, defend their country with their lives - or skills which would require using their hands instead of their minds.

However if we look past the post Civil War era, and even further than the period when Black people were enslaved, to the shores of Africa, one will find a very different form of education:

" The first formal education was spoken tradition given during African initiation ceremonies. These ceremonies had leaders who were called " medicine men " . Ceremonial African ritual dances laid the basis for many later forms of the dance. Music also existed in prehistoric Africa. Among instruments used were; reed pipes, single - stringed instruments, drums, gourd rattles, blocks of wood and hollow logs. Many very good prehistoric African artists brought paintings and sculptors into the common culture. The early Africans made a careful study of animal life and plant life. "

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Askia Mohammed must be credited with the creation of a strongly centralized government in the Songhay Empire. Under his rule it not only enjoyed a high level of material culture, but was also the home of an intellectual achievement of no mean order. In the principal cities of West Africa, such as, Gao, Jenne, and Timbuktu, universities and other educational

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6. John Jackson, Introduction to African Civilization ( N.J., The Citadel Press, 1974 ) p.24

institutions were established, and their level of scholarship was of a high caliber. In the schools, colleges, universities of Songhay Empire, courses were given in astronomy, mathematics, ethnography, medicine, hygiene, philosophy, logic, diction, elocution, thetoric, and music.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Black people in America have been deprived of an education which was customary in their " mother country " .

The issue of racial segregation was absent from the traditional African communities. In America, after all these years, racial segregation remains an outstanding concern on both the national and international level. During the 1870's, the pattern of segregated education began to emerge. There seemed, however, to be no clear policy in the nation except the South. In recent years the N.A.A.C.P. and other groups have campaigned against the " de facto " segregation, or separate schools arising out of the segregated housing in urban areas, in the North and West.<sup>8</sup>

The history of segregation in American public schools is a long one. Even in the present , Black people express concern over the issue of desegregation. One of the most familiar arguments is this ; " We have to send our Black children to white schools because that is the only way that they will get a better education . " <sup>9</sup> And what are we saying is a " better " education?

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7. William S. Jackson, Johanne V. Rhone, Social Service Delivery System in the Black Community ( Atlanta: Alton M. Childs series, 1973 ) p.26

8. William W. Brickman, Educational Systems in the United States ( N.Y., The Center for Applied Research in Education , 1964 ) p.1

9. Ibid., p. 106

Are we saying that a Black person will be a " better " individual as a result of attending a white school? Our concern should not be whether Black and white children attend schools together, in the same setting, but should focus on the quality of education our children are receiving. We should instead question the purpose of education, what is the content of the books used, who are teaching our children, and what is in the minds of the educators. However, another question which cannot be avoided is " Is quality education possible with racial and economic segregation ? "

Higher education, through its advanced degrees, is a significant gatekeeper for society. Unfortunately, these " gates " are relatively closed for the lower socioeconomic groups and open for the middle and upper groups. Thus, the system of higher education is basically elite, an institution that perpetuates the system of stratification in the larger society. The elitist nature of higher education justifiably make it a target of the disadvantaged groups in the American society.

### III. Education as a Tool for Socialization

Education functions to shape the personalities of students so that they are congruent with the demands of the culture. It also aids in preparing children for their adult roles. In America this means preparing individuals for the specialized roles of a highly complex division of labor.

The formal system of education in American society is conservative. In other words, the special task of the school is to preserve the culture, not to transform it. Thus, the schools indoctrinate their pupils in the culturally prescribed way. The socialization process takes place through the philosophical orientation of schools. <sup>10</sup>

The Greeks were the first to think philosophically about education; indeed, one of the central concerns of Athenian philosophy in its great age was with education. <sup>11</sup> The Greeks saw the problem with education as being that of transmission and acquisition of something which they called "arete", which is better translated as "excellence". Originally, the Greeks meant athletic excellence, but as their culture deepened and widened, they came to regard as desirable - intellectual and moral, as well as physical excellence. In other words, they thought of the problem of education as that of the acquisition or transmission of excellence ... excellence which they did not know how to acquire, nor exactly what it was, in fact.

Aristotle went even further, he not only introduced a definition for "excellence"; but also worked out a rationale for the whole enterprise - what excellences were to be produced, why and how - which is what makes him a philosopher of education. By implication Aristotle asserts that a complete philosophy of education

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10. D. Stanley Eitzen, Social Structure and Social Problems in America ( Boston : Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1974 ) p. 310

11. William K. Franena, Three Historical Philosophies of Education ( Chicago: Keystones of Education Series, 1965 ) p. 15

must answer four questions:

1. What kind of education is best - i.e., appropriate to an individual or a people with the best natural endowment ( intelligence and spirit ) living in the most favorable circumstances?
2. What kind of education is best for a given individual or people - i.e., best relatively to them?
3. What kind of education is best for a majority of people?
4. What kind of education will produce the dispositions desired by a given individual or people ? 12

Coming to more concrete rules and practices of teaching, Aristotle begins with a description of the " great debate " in education, which holds as well today:

" At present opinion is divided about the subjects of education. People do not all take the same position about what should be learned by the young, either with a view of excellence, or a view to the best of life; nor is it clear whether their studies should be directed mainly to the intellect, or to moral character. If we look at actual practice, the picture is also confusing; and it is not clear whether the proper studies to be pursued are those that are useful in life - those that make for excellence - or those that are non-essential. Each kind of study gets some support. Even those that make for excellence there is no agreement, for men do not all honor the same excellence, and so naturally they differ about the proper training for it. " 13

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12. Robert A. Tyler, Philosophy of Education ( New York: The McMillan Co., 1951 ) p. 427

13. Frankena, p. 63



Aristotle, however, laid down a number of principles for the guidance of educators and legislators in the ideal state. Some he stated explicitly, but others are only implicit in what he says:

1. Citizens and non-citizens should receive different educations, since their capacities and functions are different ( i.e., citizens should be taught liberal education and non-citizens vocational education).
2. Citizens must be trained to both obey and rule, since they will have their turn at ruling and being ruled; non-citizens must be taught to obey.
3. Education must prepare citizens for both action ( e.g., moral, military, political ) and leisure ( free time filled with intellectual activity ).
4. Citizens should be equipped with the dispositions and skills needed for war, but since war is for the sake of peace, he must be even more equipped for peace.
5. Education must prepare men to do what is necessary, what is useful, and what is noble or excellent in itself, but it must prefer the excellent and consider the necessary and the useful only as means to it.

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In Aristotle's scheme of education, then, it is clear that he did not believe that all men should have the same education, or that education should be the same everywhere. Aristotle maintains that education must be relative to the constitution, and hence will vary from country to country. Aristotle saw some people as natural slaves to be workers, yet he provided no system for de-

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14. Albert Schweitzer, A History of Education in Antiquity ( New York: Mentor Books, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1964 ) p.193

termining who are natural slaves. Even in the case of girls, where there is a distinguishing physical mark, it never occurred to Aristotle that some might have the intellect required for moral and intellectual excellence. In this case, he felt that they should be tested in a program to see how far they could go.<sup>15</sup> There remains, therefore, a basic injustice in Aristotle's educational and social scheme; traces of which remain today.

As mentioned earlier, the American philosophy of education appears to be one of "individualism", or more specifically, "competition". Competition plays a significant role as a motivational force in public schools educational process. Children are forced to compete against each other for grades, class status and adult acceptance.<sup>16</sup> They learn to believe that success is dependent upon the individual alone, and that one's goal in life must be to win, whatever the cost. This kind of education contributes to the belief in the capitalist myth that individual hard work will lead to success.

Since professional educators are the chief beneficiaries, they are naturally the chief propagators of certain myths about education. Chief among these are the myths:

1. That the fundamental purpose of education in our age of abundance is to increase earning power.
2. That the achievement level of children can be defined and measured by their response to words on a printed page.

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15. Ibid., p. 200

16. Leonetta Gaines, p. 13

3. That schools are the best and only place for people to get an education, and therefore, that the more young people are compelled to attend school, and the more extended the period that they are compelled to attend, the more educated they will become.
4. That attainment of an education insures students that piece of upward mobility - i.e., a good job ( This myth incorrectly assumes that there is no racism in this country, no competition, and that there is equal opportunity for everyone. )

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The rebellions in secondary schools and colleges during the past few years are a sign that Black people, both the young and old, have already begun to reject these myths. The struggle to destroy the roots of these myths will continue to escalate. Black people are beginning to take a closer look at the education their children are receiving, and not receiving.

The most imperative and crucial element in the concept of the " mis-education " of Black people hinges on the education system's failure to present authentic Black History in schools; and knowledge that there was a scarcity of literature available for such a purpose, because most history books chose to ignore the presence of the Black man in America. <sup>18</sup>

As education is examined closer, it is recognized that education for Black children is inadequate. This realization should convince us more and more that Black people must commit them-

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17. Grace L. Boggs, pp. 12- 13

18. Carter G. Woodson, p. v.

selves to the development of a " new education " .

The neglect of Afro- American History, and the distortion of facts concerning Black people has deprived Black children, indeed, the entire race, of a heritage. Since Black children have been miseducated the educational system perpetuates a vicious cycle. Consequently, mis-educated individuals graduating, then proceed to teach and mis-educate others.

Black and other minorities thus find themselves in the curious position of being mis-educated by a system that represents only the interest of the majority. Such students are ordered to attend school under compulsory education laws seemingly for the express purpose of being convinced of their own " uneducability " 19

#### IV. Contradictions of Education

On the level of race, the white oriented educational system assumes the superiority of whites and their system of values and includes blackness only as a negative pole of reference. In white oriented schools, Blacks are taught to despise themselves and their possibilities. In their schools, Blacks are educated away from themselves - away from their people, away from their rhythm, away from their genius, away from their soul. 20

The point is that Blacks ought to be educated from the insides of themselves. That is, what they should seek is the authen-

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19. Preston R. Wilcox, "Ghetto Education: New Direction", Radical School Reform ( New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969 ) p. 127

20. Vincent Harding, IBW and Education for Liberation ( Chicago: Third World Press, 1973 ) p. 6

ticity of their truth. And the truth for Black people is not in white libraries. Consequently, Black people must be carries of their own own truth.

Many Black people feel that their children must learn what white children are learning, since they will be operating in a white world. It is obvious that these persons have failed to recognize the special gifts and insights of their people. If Black children only learn what white children learn, America will have nothing to sing and dance about. There will be a vacuum in the dreaming and desiring of men.

Education is presumed by many as the great equalizer. Unfortunately, the schools have served to aid in the perpetuation of social and economic differences. The follow statement made by a sociologist following a study done in Cleveland schools seems to apply that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds should be blamed for their performance:

" There is no question that children of low socio-economic background do not perform in school as well as children of the more well to do. "

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William Ryan has summarized the situation in this way:

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21. Preston R. Wilcox, p. 127.

" The school is better prepared for the middle-class child, than for the lower-class child. Indeed, we could be tempted to say further that the school experiences are tailored for, and stacked in favor of, the middle-class child. The cause-and-effect relationship between the lack of skills and the conditions of the lower-class has yet to be delineated. So far, explanations of this relationship have been, at best, sketchy, and have been based on casual observation. We know poor and middle class children exhibit certain differences in styles of talking and thinking, but we do not know these differences " whys " and " hows " . We do know, however, that these differences - really differences in style rather than ability - are not handicaps or disabilities ( unlike barriers to learning as poor vision, mild brain damage, emotional disturbances, or orthopedic handicaps ) . They do not represent inadequate preparation for the reality of the modern urban school. They are in no way, cultural or intellectual defects. "

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Notice that Ryan has phrased his statement as to focus on the system, not the victim. This is contrary to the typical response, which is likely to focus on the " cultural deprivation " of the poor. That approach attacks the home and culture of poor people. It assumes that these people are handicapped by their culture.

The written and spoken language of American schools is also expected to be middle-class. For children of the poor, however, English ( at least middle class English ) may be a second language. The problem is that the curriculum of the school does not bend. The schools do not adapt and accomodate themselves to the special needs of the poor.

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Even though schools are more or less segregated by the socioeconomic composition of local neighborhoods, the correlation is by no means perfect. Almost total segregation by socioeconomic status is realized within the schools by the tracking system.<sup>24</sup> This system, employed by about half of the high schools in the United States, divides the entire student body into two or more distinct career lines, or tracks such as clooee preparatory, vocational, business, general, or remedial. The major rationale for tracking is that it makes possible a better fit between the needs and capabilities of the student and the demands and opportunities of the curriculum. Consequently, most students from low-income families are disproportionately placed in the lowest track, resulting in a reinforcement of the social class structure.<sup>25</sup> This, of course, is contrary to the ideal of the school system as open and democratic.

To segregate students, by ability or by future plans, is detrimental to the students labelled as "lower". It is an elitist system that needs to be re-evaluated and changed. For the most part it takes the children of the elite and educates them to take the elite positions of society. Conversely, the children of the non-elite are trauned to recapitulate experiences of their parents. In a presumably democratic system that prides itself in providing avenues of upward social mobility, such a system borders on immorality. Since these children are discouraged

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24. Ibid., p. 329

25. Ibid., p. 333

from institutions of higher learning, and the nature of the job market has become such that virtually all jobs providing an entree into the middle class requires a college education, they are further placed at a disadvantage. American schools continue to fail Blacks and as summarized by Ryan:

" We are dealing, it would seem, not so much with culturally deprived children as with culturally depriving schools. And the task to be accomplished is not to revise, and amend, and repair deficient children, but to alter and transform the atmosphere and operations of the school to which we commit these children. Only by changing the nature in the educational experiences can we change its products. "

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## V. THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

The schools as training grounds for an authoritarian society, is deeply rooted in hierarchal relationships. The student learns that there are figures who are always right - people who are to be obeyed without questions. This kind of education creates dependent people who lack the ability to make judgements of their own. Obviously, these people are more responsive to accepting life within a capitalist system.

Seldom are attempts made to " teach " concepts, processes, relationships - academic subjects are taught in isolation of each other, and are presented as being separate from the social forces which created them. 27

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26. William Ryan, Blaming the Victim ( N.Y.: Pantheon Book, 1971 ) p. 60



It is clear that the schools in this society operate as an extension of an exploitative economic system. The implications for Blacks are profound, for the demands of capitalism, added to those of racism combine to intensify the effects of the system and concurrently the schools on Blacks.

The community also plays a vital role in the " politics " surrounding education. The political dialogue of the community is often not concerned with the quality of education for children, but with peripheral issues, such as, busing. There is also much discord concerning financing schools. Consequently, Black schools are poorly financed, and offer inadequate educational programs many times. However, the problem is not money, but impoverished human relation.

## VI. Alternatives for Education of Blacks

It is now clear that American public education is organized and functions along social and economic class lines. The class and social organization of American public schools is consistently associated with a lower level of educational efficiency as expressed in terms of the fact that the schools attended by Black and poor children have less adequate educational facilities than those attended by more privileged children. The pervasive and persistent educational inefficiency which characterizes these schools results in:

1. Marked and cumulative academic retardation in a disproportionately high percentage of these children.

2. A high percentage of dropouts in junior and senior high school.
  3. A pattern of rejection and despair and hopelessness.
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Given these conditions, American public schools have become significant instruments in the blocking of economic mobility and in the intensification of class distinction; rather than fulfilling their historic function of facilitating such mobility.

No one can deny that the American educational system has problems. Not only is the structure questioned, but the overall philosophy of the system. The present system is predicated on the needs of an industrial society where citizens must follow orders. In order for Black children to benefit from such a system, there must be some radical reforms. One mean for making such reforms is through community controlled schools.

Black people have watched the failures of the present school system, and have concluded that those in control of that system define its objectives in terms of White America. Community controlled schools function as an acculturation tool, an educational instrument, and a community center. 30

As an acculturation tool, community controlled schools serve as a viable connection between different cultures in an environment which respects and cherishes creative differences.

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29. Ronald and Beatrice Gross, Radical School Reform ( N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1969 ) p. 116

30. Preston R. Wilcox, p. 128

As an educational instrument, such a school serves three purposes:

- a. learning for use
- b. developing a sense of functional curiosity, and
- c. assuming a large part of the responsibility for developing their own intellectual resources.

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As a community center, it becomes a facility where the community begins to meet its needs for recreation and fun; the place where the community begins to formalize efforts to express itself through art, music, drama, etc. It also becomes a locale for dealing with the issue of housing, traffic, health, education, and other social realities.

Hopefully, these can be integrated into one program. In order for it to be successful, the educational philosophy must be one that views learning as being lifelong and as taking place inside the classroom, and within the community.<sup>32</sup> One of the early innovators of the community controlled school concept stated it in this way:

" Formulation of school activities, planning of curricula, school administration, classroom techniques, and so forth, result in positive achievements only if and when all educational procedures are developed under constant awareness of the extra - school educational forces active in the background of the students. " 32

Community control of schools has many advocates; most of them members of the community that want to gain control. Their

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31. Ibid., p. 129

analysis of why community control is essential is basically a political one, seeing the school as a colonial institution that reflects and perpetuates our society's oppression of minority groups. 33

The opponents of community controlled schools have been, for the most part, professional educators on the one hand, and legislators on the other. They insist that poor people are not qualified to run the schools; they imply that poor people in power would be corrupt and torn by violent power struggles; they insist that the impulse behind the struggle for control is a threat to job power. 34 Dorothy Stoneman argues that community control is a necessary part of the political and the educational revolution. Her arguments are based on the following assumptions:

1. The schools for minority children run and staffed by people of the white majority have failed.
2. The members of the white majority cannot free themselves from racist and class ideas they have been taught unless the power relationship between them and the minority group is drastically changed.
3. That children get a good education in an environment where adults are not divided by racist and class attitudes.
4. That a good education for children includes the development of pride, hope, responsibility, the expectation of growing into a fulfilling adult within a community.

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33. Dorothy Stoneman, Doing Your Own School ( Boston : Beacon Press, 1972 ) p. 141

34. Ibid., pp. 141-142

5. That in a ghetto area the only kind of school which has the possibility of developing these attitudes and feelings is one which is itself a responsible and co-operative community within which a child's parents have an opportunity for a fulfilling adult life, for pride, hope, responsibility and for personal growth.
6. That the only kind of school offering this opportunity to parents is one in which the parents have primary responsibility for the operation, development, and direction of school.
7. That a child's identification with his parents and with his own community is a more important determinant of his expectations than any particular school experience.
8. That professional teachers tend to forgive themselves for not succeeding fully at their job because their job is so very difficult.
9. That, having forgiven themselves and needing still further justification for their failure, professional teachers tend to blame parents for the failures of children in their classes.
10. That parents in a position to hire and fire teachers as in a parent-controlled school, will not tolerate teacher failure and will not tolerate being blamed for teacher failure.
11. That this refusal to tolerate failure will generate in teachers a new commitment to success.
12. This new commitment to success will generate in both teachers and parents a willingness to co-operate.

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The key to the new system of education is contained in the community. The schools today are in the Black community but not of it. They are not responsive or accountable to it. The teaching and administrative staff come from outside the community while they are living off the community.

The parents and leaders of the Black community who recognize the problems of the schools are effectively cut off from any power to make changes in the education of their children. The lack of Black control of Black schools is one of the chief causes for the specific malpractices and their ygly consequences.

The failure of many Black children cannot be overcome simply through peripheral Black culture programs. Significant improvements will occur only when Black people can look upon the schools as institutions which express their own aspirations. 36

A powerful and long range recruiting device of the Muslim movement has been its parochial schools, with their massive emphasis on education about the Black man - his resplendent past, his divine nature, and his triumphant future. 37

In 1972 the Muslims had 14 parochial schools ( called Universities ) in operation. The schools are staffed by both Muslim and non-Muslim teachers, and most of them are accredited by the local accrediting authority. Their school year is 53 weeks long. There is no vacation from the " tricknology " of the white man. 38 The Elijah Muhammad, whose own formal education did not exceed the fourth grade, had very definite

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36. Edited by Louis L. Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt, Institutional Racism ( N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc. ) 1969 p. 32.

37. C. Eric Lincoln , The Black Muslim in America ( Canada: Beacon Press, 1973 ) p. 131

38. Ibid., p. 132

ideas about what an education should accomplish:

" The so- called American Negro needs self-education... in order to get the respect and recognition of others ... He needs even more than an equal education. He needs a superior education to that which is ruling the nations of the earth today. "

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Muhammad is echoed by Minister Fsrrakhan, who explains:

" We are 400 years behind, 100 years up from slavery. We have a lot of catching up to do, and though we are to enjoy life, we have no time for a lot of play and a lot of sports. "

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Consequently, sports and the usual extracurricular activities are not a part of the Muslim program except insofar as they contribute directly to the serious search for knowledge.

The Muslim curriculum consists of science, reading, mathematics, history, arts, and language. Language ( Arabic ) and math are taught to children from the age of 3. All classes at the more developed schools are taught in Arabic and English.

The teachers all have bachelor's degrees in the areas of their subject matter, and many of them have earned advanced degrees. Standard textbooks are used, but their subject matter is taught selectively and supplemented by parocial material.

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39. Ibid. p. 132-33

40. Ibid., p. 133

School is a very serious matter for Muslim boys and girls. The Muslim teachers have few of the problems of discipline common to other schools. They assert with the confidence of certainty: " There is no juvenile delinquency among our children . " 41

The children are separated by sex. In some schools boys attend school in the morning, and the girls attend in the afternoon. There is no play or rest periods. Also no time off for lunch. The boys wear jackets ( except in summer ) and ties. The girls dress in ankle-length, flowing white gowns with matching head-wraps:

" You make a child shyless", said Muhammad, " when you allow them to wear dresses above their knees or place young girls in the same classroom with young boys. " " there is a natural attraction between male and female", explains Farrakhan, " when they are close together, that attraction begins to work and they're not so attracted to the wisdom, they are here to learn... we won't have anything going on while education is suppose to be going on. "

42

Minister Yusef Shah, Dean of Boys at the University Muslim school in Chicago, writes:

" One can readily see that the system of education proposed and instituted by Messenger Muhammad... is successful in effectively educating Black children... Coeducation does not exist in the Muhammad universities of Islam. Coeducation is the Western way of educating youth. Separate education is the Islamic way of educating youth. Separate education... destroys such social atrocities as immorality, social disease, promiscuity and other social faith and indecencies. It is a fact that coeducation does not and will not foster a moral education."

43



The Muslim students are inculcated with the notion that their education is the best available. The Muslims place a high premium upon special education for wives, and mothers, and their Muslim Girl's Training and General Civilization Class is an effective means of drawing Black women into the movement. The Training Class concentrates primarily on the art of homemaking. It meets on week nights at the local temples, and the women are taught to sew, cook keep house, rear their children, care for their husbands, and how to behave at home and abroad.<sup>44</sup> High moral behavior is an absolute requirement, for a Muslim can rise no higher than his women. <sup>45</sup>

Many lower class Blacks find the approach to education a welcomed change from the white-oriented teaching in nearly all public schools. Today, to have their children learn something about themselves and their heritage is strong among Black people of all classes. Parents whose children attend Muslim schools are impressed with the concrete evidence of the Muslims' determination to free themselves from all-white influences and to prepare their youth for roles as reclaimers of the Black Man's heritage. Finally, the schools are status symbols for the low-income family, who could never hope to afford the luxury of ordinary private schools. <sup>46</sup>

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44. Ibid. p. 137

45. John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom ( New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956) p. 472

The African - based school , similar somewhat to the community controlled school, and the Muslim school is generally a non-profit inatitution which educates Black children. The reason for the growth of the African-based school is because of the growing concern for all Black children who enter public schools, curious and alert, only to have their eagerness crushed by an obsolescent system.<sup>47</sup>

Many have attributed the ensuing apathy to a lack of sufficient educational experiences in the child's early years, and have therefore instituted programs aimed at providing the child with those skills and attitudes which will enable him, in their opinion, to successfully function in this society. The problem with programs of this nature is that they assume that the apathy is a result of the child's background, rather than a result of problems in the public education system itself.

African based schools contend that their program will have a lasting effect because they have taken into account the deficiencies which exist in the public education system. Therefore, their program is aimed at teaching children, parents, and the community how to deal with them.

The major problem of the public school system lies in the areas of inadequate facilities; administration that is seldomly involved in educational issues which affect the actual learning process; teachers who are either overworked or disinterested; and in the isolation of the school

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from the child's home and community. 48

The African-based school works to involve its students, parents and the community. It struggles to change the values that have allowed people to passively accept an inadequate educational system, and at the same time provides a model of meaningful education.

African based schools see the center of the community as being an ideal location. It is convenient for reaching a large number of segments in the Black community, and educates the child to stay in his own community, instead of educating him out of it.

Children are instilled with an awareness of the values of hard work, persistence and independence; in conjunction with a sense of community, and an awareness of their responsibility to teaching others what they have learned. Thus prepared, they should be able to help themselves and others to counteract the deficiencies of the public school system.

The curriculum is developed to equip the child with pre-requisites for self-sufficiency. It is designed to give the children a strong sense of identity and a working knowledge of their environment. Specific skills such as: Black History, Reading, Mathematics, Science, Writing, and Arts and Crafts are usually taught. Exercises are geared towards

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48. Ibid., p. 4

developing perceptual, conceptual, and manipulative skills.

The school also sees as an important objective, sharing its work with the larger community. It does this in several ways. Among them: community workshops, artist programs, consultancies, and distribution of writings.

Through these efforts in reaching members of the Black community the school hopes to increase people's awareness of the educational needs of Black children, and help to build in them a determination to making certain that these needs are met.

Therefore, the African-based school is effective in three main areas:

- (1) Through working with the nucleus of children and parent who have immediate contact with the school, it is creating a core group of people both knowledgeable and concerned about the quality education, and who have the skills and experience to make significant changes in the general educational system.
- (2) Through its work with the larger community, it is creating a group of people willing to support its efforts, and perhaps to instigate efforts of their own.
- (3) Through distributing materials, consultancies and the like, it is serving as a model for effective education of Black children throughout the country.

49

The primary support of African-based schools comes from two main sources: (1) parental donations ( according to their income) and ( 2) possibly monies from educational foundations.

## CONCLUSION

Education in America, as we know it, is a strictly a utilitarian endeavor. Schools have not been established solely for the sake of education, but are the producers of a designated mentality conducive to the perpetuation and continuation of America's present national life. The function of education has never been to free the minds and spirits of men, but to bind and mold them into a specific cultural pattern.

The present educational system has failed our children. Not merely in the ways noted by most school critics: too little money for education, outdated curricula, poorly trained teachers, but in more fundamental ways. It is not just that schools have failed to do what they proposed to do, rather that they are not even decent places for our children to be. They more often than not damage and stifle children's natural capacity to learn and grow healthily. To borrow Jonathan Kozol's frightening, but necessary metaphor: " they destroy the minds and hearts of our children. "

We ask children to do for most of the day what few adults are able to do for even an hour. How many of us, attending, say a lecture that doesn't interest us, can keep our minds from wandering? Hardly any. Yet children have far less awareness of the control of their attention than we do.

Public education is the " growth industry " of the nation today. It is well documented that next to defense, education is the single largest enterprise in our political economy and, unlike

even defense, it is the one American activity that in some way or at some time directly involves every single citizen. Even so despite the size of the American educational establishment, it is remarkable how little is understood of the educative process, especially of the intellectual bases of education.

There is a great need for education in America to be radically reformed. Black students have for a long time been the victims of mental cruelty and alienation from the community. In the big cities the Black communities are demanding full control of their schools. Reforms are debated which would have branded the community as "anti-American" ten years ago. Abandonment of public education has been proposed in favor of a competitive system of private and public alternatives. Community controlled Black schools in the ghetto have been proposed as preferable to integrated schooling and political and economic reform as a prerequisite to better education.

Community controlled schools give Black people control of their community's growth and development. The community has control of the school for self-determination for building a strong self-image.

Advocates of community controlled schools feel that such schools are mandatory for the survival of the community. Policy implementors are not community people nor ethnically representative of the community. In addition, they are not community minded or sensitive to the socio-economic trends in the community that affect pupil and parental attitudes towards the school.

Policy makers are many times out of touch with the grass root people, eg., parents, children, the community. Black people have felt a sense of powerlessness because of discriminatory and racist practices in this country. There is a need to be in more control over their own destiny. To gain control, a prospective solution is to redirect and reform those institutions which have failed Black Americans.

The educational system in America failed Black children in four specific ways. First, it fails to provide Blacks with the skills and attitudes to fill economic and social roles necessary for self-maintenance. A system which adjudges some individuals as inherently inferior cannot provide them with the skills and attitudes to move upward socially and economically in any significant number.

Secondly, the educational system fails to meet the intellectual, emotional, social and physical needs of Black children. It is logical to assume that when a people desires from an institution- e.g., feelings of self-worth, pride, self-assurance, etc. - that which the institution is not committed to providing, then that people cannot be intellectually or emotionally fulfilled by that institution.

Thirdly, the institution of education fails to promote a true sense of national identity for Black children. Black children are indoctrinated into the Euro-American culture. The system wants Black children to be loyal to America, but at the same time adjudges them as something less than American.

, Finally, schools fail to provide Black children with positive images of themselves, but instead imposes the values and mores of the dominant culture to insure its preservation.

Policy makers in control of educational policies are also aware of the failures of the school system in relation to Black children, but have yet to come up with relevant alternatives. In response to such failure they have instituted 1) compensatory education - a "blaming the victim" kind of solution to the problem; compensation for deprivation in the home; 2) integration - a kind of "monkey see, monkey do" approach. It implies that the only way to help a Black child is to seat him next to a white child,, and 3) school reform - whites sudden realization that their children were being short-changed too.

Quality education has become a value to most American households. However, it is difficult if not impossible, for a monolithic public school system to respond to the different conceptions of quality education held by a pluralistic society, and consequently these differences result in increased confrontation.

For many Blacks, during the 60's, community controlled schools provided a glimpse of alternative programs tailored to their perceived needs. The purpose of the community controlled school is to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives and, ultimately, new directions for actions.



There are various alternatives open to Black who are looking for a viable educational process. The community controlled school as an alternative involves the interaction of the children, parents, and the community in which they live. Possibly the change should start outside of the school system, but in society itself. Whatever the choices, education for Black people must begin to fill the void left by the present system. That responsibility is ours to create a new and " better socialization for our people.

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